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On the Conversion of Lydia.

[Concluded from page 164.]

The manner of Lydia's conversion ought not to be overlooked. Her heart was opened. There is something gentle, as well as effectual, in the representation. *The spirit of God not only operates by a variety of instruments, but by a considerable diversity of modes.* He descends on Sinai in tempests, and on Calvary in smiles. Sometimes his manifestations are terrible, and sometimes soothing; sometimes he breaks, and sometimes he opens the heart. In scripture, we are furnished with illustrations of this diversified operation. Manasseh, who "made Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the Heathens," and who "would not hearken" to divine monitions, was taken by the Assyrians "among the thorns, and bound with fetters and carried to Babylon." He who was unaffected either by mercies or by menaces in his prosperity, "when he was in affliction besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his king-

dom; now Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." Paul, who breathed out threatening and slaughter against the Christian church, was suddenly struck to the earth by a miraculous light from Heaven, and from a persecutor, transformed into an apostle. The Philippian gaoler exclaimed, amidst his terrors, "what must I do to be saved," and was not only prevented from committing suicide, but directed to Heaven by the doctrine of his apostolical prisoner, which, *through grace*, he cordially received. On the other hand, Samuel, Timothy and Lydia, were drawn with bonds of love. They heard the whispers of mercy, and felt the attractions of grace. Each of their hearts, like that of Lydia was opened. Passion subsided, prejudice withdrew, ignorance melted away. They were not taken by storm, but "made willing in the day of his power."

This change, in whatever manner, or at whatever time, it may be wrought, is essential to the possession of paradise, and to be indifferent to it is a mark of condemnation. Its present influence, and its future consequences, are so wonderful, that it becomes us to cherish an immediate and incessant solicitude upon the subject. *Look upward.* Almighty love "waits to be gracious." Is it not recorded, and can it ever be forgotten, that "every

one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened?" If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

The account of Lydia is further illustrative of the effects resulting from a divine influence upon the human heart. The first of those effects is intimated by the statement, that "she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Lydia heard to profit, she listened, reflected, and "inwardly digested," the truths of the gospel. She heard with seriousness, and *with self-application*. The gospel came to her, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the holy ghost, and in much assurance," for she "received the word of God, which she heard, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh."

And is this descriptive of our views and feelings? Do we pay attention to divine instruction, and "hear so that our souls may live." Is the word of God to us, like descending manna from the skies, which we go forth, with eager haste, to gather for our spiritual subsistence? Whenever we repair to "the house of God," are we "more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools?" Do we aim to remember, seek to understand, and humbly resolve to practice, what is taught? Or do we go to public worship with reluctant and hesitating steps, carried thither by the force of habit, education, example or terror? When arrived, do we enter with irreverence, assume a careless and familiar attitude, give the rein to our wandering thoughts, *resign our consciences to unhallowed slumber*, or

watch the slowly revolving hour, that will free us from an irksome service? When retired from public engagements, do we forget God our maker, dissipate consecrated hours, and at length lose every salutary impression amidst the cares of life, and the subordinate concerns of a moment?

Some persons are accustomed to plead their business, as an extenuation of the guilt of religious negligence, or to exempt them from the claims of religious piety. They are too busy to pay an immediate regard to the interests of the soul and eternity. We have, in Lydia, a valuable example to cite:—"Learn of a woman, whose name cannot perish, though generations pass away, and the stars become extinct." Lydia was not a person of leisure; she was "a seller of purple." She had surely sufficient occupation, and yet she had no apologies at hand. She was not too much engaged, to be concerned about her eternal salvation; but when the Apostle of the Gentiles preached, she *must* go, she must hear, she must attend. She was "diligent in *'business,'*" but this did not preclude her being "fervent in spirit."

Every thing is beautiful in its season. *We must not wander from our proper business, under pretence of religion, nor must we neglect religion upon a plea of business.* Religion does not require a relinquishment of our calling, or station in society, but no civil engagements can justify a disregard of religion. If we imitate Lydia in diligence, let us not forget to imitate her in piety. It is wicked to aver, that the concerns of this world, and those of another, interfere; because an ardent religion is not only compatible with worldly occupations, but promotes both their

purity and integrity, if it do not ensure their success.

Another effect of divine influence upon the heart of Lydia, and essentially connected with her reception of the great principles of christianity, was an immediate attention to the ordinance of baptism. "She was baptised, and her household." With a promptitude which was at once expressive of her sincerity and faith, and the zeal of her mind, she did not hesitate to observe the baptismal institution of her Lord and Saviour. She had also the happiness of seeing her household introduced, by baptism, into the church of Christ. She no doubt felt extreme solicitude for their spiritual interests; and from the moment of her own conversion, would give them every opportunity of attending the Apostolic instructions.

But let us enquire, whether we resemble Lydia? Do we *monopolize* the hopes of salvation, and the cup of spiritual blessing? Or are we active distributors of the Heavenly bounty? What do we feel for our families, our children, our domestics, our dependents, our friends and connections? What have we done for them? They need instruction—they possess souls to be saved, or lost—they are responsible creatures—they are given us in charge by Providence, and will finally meet us at the tribunal of God. Should it not awaken alarm to be accessary, in any degree, to their destruction, whether by negligence or bad example? Is it not worthy of a holy ambition to become instrumental to their eternal welfare? Do you lead them to the domestic altar? Do you watch over their conduct with a vigilant and paternal eye? Do you guide them to the house of God? To shew them the path to Heaven—to be instrumental in lodging one important sen-

timent in their minds—to sow, *if but a single grain*, that may vegetate and rise into a tree of holiness, is incalculably more satisfactory, and more honourable, than to obtain the victories of an Alexander, or the riches of a Cræsus. *O! let us never remain content with a solitary religion*; but aim, like Lydia, to multiply our satisfactions, and in the spirit of an exalted charity, to distribute happiness in the earth. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man (as a christian) dieth to himself."

Another, and most visible effect of Lydia's conversion, was an affectionate regard to the servants of Christ. She invited Paul, and the companions of his labours, to "come into her house, and abide there." The invitation was not cold and formal. She intreated, she "constrained them." Gratitude was undoubtedly, the principal occasion of this urgency. She had received, through their instrumentality, the best gift of Heaven. The eyes of her understanding had been enlightened, the affections of her heart had been excited and sanctified to a noble purpose. They had proclaimed to her with surprising effect, "Jesus and the resurrection;" and but for them she would not, humanly speaking, have become acquainted with the Christian religion. They had unlocked the door of wisdom, and put her in possession of the ample treasures of truth; they had taught her the evil of sin, and shown her "the Lord our righteousness;" they had dispersed her doubts, dispelled her fears, removed her darkness, satisfied her inquiries, and conducted her to "the light of the world," now risen upon benighted nations, and whose blessed radiance was already diffused in every direction. Lydia was anxious to repay these

benefits, or rather to testify her overwhelming sense of their immensity. *And have we cherished similar sentiments?* Have we revered and ministered to the servants of our Lord? Have we thus "rendered honour to whom honour is due, esteeming them very highly in love for their work's sake," and having been made "partakers of their spiritual things," considered it our "duty to minister unto them in carnal things?" Respect for the truth itself ought to generate a suitable predilection for such as faithfully dispense it. If in any instances the ministers of Christ act inconsistently with their character, a mind like that of Lydia, would not become dissatisfied with the truth itself, nor hastily utter extravagant censure. A sincere piety which sympathizes with all the adversities and prosperities of the Christian cause, and knows the general, and especially the personal consequences of such deplorable inconsistencies, will commiserate and weep and pray.

Lydia might probably be influenced, in making this request, by another consideration. She expected great advantage from more familiar intercourse with her guests. In the social hour, at the friendly table, in the retirement of home, she could propose inquiries, which such a man as St. Paul would be ready to hear, and happy to answer. Happy, thrice happy for us, when we make a proper selection of our bosom friends, and improve the hours of social intercourse to the purpose of spiritual improvement. Nothing is more advantageous, than reciprocal communication; it elicits truth, corrects mistake, improves character, conduces to happiness, animates to diligence, and gives a new impulse to our moral energies. "Then they that feared the Lord,

spake often to one another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day, when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son, that serveth him."

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION,

In a Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of London, at the Visitation, May 16, 1817. By Joseph Holden Pott, M. A. Archdeacon of London:

In addressing you my Reverend Brethren, upon this occasion of our Annual Assembly, I trust I shall not be thought to mispend the time, or to waste the opportunity, the use of which I ought to regard with so much solicitude, if I present to you some few reflections which appear to me to be applicable to our own day, and which relate to subjects whose intrinsic value and importance must challenge our perpetual attention.

In adverting to our own age, I do not mean to call your notice to any late events, or to any public measures now depending; nor to the minuter points of any special controversy; however interesting such topics might be, and however needful it may sometimes prove, to touch such questions upon suitable occasions. My considerations will not be confined to such particulars.

The reflections which I have to offer will respect the substance of all that is most interesting to us as ministers of Christ, as candidates for future blessings, and as those who shall have to give account not only for their own employment of

that which they receive for their own profit, but of that with which they are entrusted for the benefit of others.

With an hearty desire, then, that they who have the interests of their fellow creatures most at heart may not fail in any manner of their end, or be diverted to some needless ground of difference, I may be allowed to say, that if ever we expect to prevent the mischiefs which have frequently arisen from an ardent zeal for peculiar tenets and opinions, disputable in themselves, and distinct entirely from essential points of faith and practice, it must be by the sure convictions which result from simple, clear, and intelligible principles.

No greater prejudice to truths insinuates itself among men, than that which is created by the zeal for such additions to the Christian Creed, or such exaggerations of its duties, as have frequently been raised. We know well what the first additions and exaggerations were, which were made in dark and superstitious ages, and how dearly they have cost the Christian world. We know too, how ardently the zeal of many has been exercised in later times, for things disputable and disputed; things which stand apart from the fixed foundations of the Christian Creed, and the known rules of Christian practice. The subject matter to which any misconceived opinions are attached, may be no less than the truth itself; and how often has the subtle infidel sought his advantage in entangled questions, and professed to triumph over truth, when he has obtained perhaps an easy victory over some misstatement of its testimonies.

Many want the skill to make exact discriminations, and are carried off by passionate and confident as-

sertions. Others will not use the necessary pains to examine and compare things on all sides, and would feel perhaps no little measure of surprize and consternation, if you could make them apprehend the real and inevitable consequences resulting from some favourite opinion which they cherish as a point of faith. The well-disposed are thus drawn to weak and untenable positions, and the calm enquirer is not fairly met, nor suitably convinced. The truth is thus deprived of its natural defences, whilst numbers are discouraged or bewildered with the difficulties which arise upon questions needless in themselves, and foreign to the sure foundations of our common hope.

The view which I propose to take, is one which I trust will prove its own claims by the bare recital of the several particulars of which it is composed: and nothing, I am well aware, can have this advantage, but that which is obvious, clear and certain.

The objects which engage my thoughts, and the proofs on which they rest, are those which are furnished to us by the whole economy of Providence in the great work of our redemption: they consist more especially, in those provisions which were openly and freely tendered; adapted to man's common nature and his moral character; marked out by punctual prescription; and enforced with every sanction of example and authority.

But that I may not be found to build general reflections upon general remarks, allow me to put forward a few distinct and ruling principles; that I may have something here to offer to which your recollection will be easily recalled in all the view which shall be taken.

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that which they receive for their own profit, but of that with which they are entrusted for the benefit of others.

With an hearty desire, then, that they who have the interests of their fellow creatures most at heart may not fail in any manner of their end, or be diverted to some needless ground of difference, I may be allowed to say, that if ever we expect to prevent the mischiefs which have frequently arisen from an ardent zeal for peculiar tenets and opinions, disputable in themselves, and distinct entirely from essential points of faith and practice, it must be by the sure convictions which result from simple, clear, and intelligible principles.

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You would not then, I conceive, my Rev. Brethren, think yourselves much burdened, if you were required to defend the following particulars: that the known perfections of the Deity constitute the great standard, and form the perpetual ground of certainty in all subjects moral and religious: that God has a witness for himself in every breast; since without the power of right discrimination, man would cease to be responsible amidst the several alternatives of good and evil: that the state of man at all times hath been a state of trial, ordered with a view to his improvement by the right employment of his faculties, upon which proficiency his present welfare, and his final happiness, have their dependence: that it has pleased God to call men to a public treaty, for their own good, by the revelation of his will; proposing reasonable grounds of faith and duty to reasonable creatures: that the course so ordered and required, is accordingly progressive, in which progress, what is proper to each stage and circumstance of human life, will be found to have its season and its place.

If you feel surprised, my Rev. Brethren, that principles so well known, and truths so obvious, should be offered to your notice at this time, you will cease perhaps to wonder, if you will but consider, that with these principles and these truths, obvious as indeed they are, exaggerated schemes are always found to be at variance, and by this test they must be tried. It is for this reason, that I shall crave your patience for a while to contemplate subjects which might otherwise appear to be more proper for the Preacher's province, than for that which falls to my part in this day's exercise of duty. But, indeed, a few plain truths well fol-

lowed, would save many a long and intricate discussion, which too often lead men quite away from every just conclusion; diverting them from fixed and necessary grounds of faith, and turning their regard from many a profitable work of Christian practice. The straight and even line of truth, in every case, becomes the measure of its own propriety, and the rule by which obliquities may be discovered.

I have but to entreat you, then, my Reverend Brethren, to trace with me for a moment, the course which was taken in the public treaty of salvation, and to mark well the known and undoubted methods which were employed for establishing that whole dispensation of Divine beneficence so graciously provided for the welfare of mankind. You will not fail to see, as we proceed, the application of those leading principles which were first advanced.

As it is a matter of the greatest moment to observe what this course was which our Lord took, and which he directed his Apostles to pursue, so is it happy for us, that of all things, it is that, perhaps, which is the most clearly witnessed to us, and the most decisively determined in the page of Scripture.

Our blessed Lord, then, declared that the chief purpose of his coming was to save that which was lost in the common ruin of a fallen nature: to call those to the knowledge of his word, who were indeed disposed to seek the truth, and ready to embrace it. He came to invite those also, who had wandered into ways of error, or had plunged themselves most deeply in the mischiefs and pollutions of transgression and misdeed.

Our Lord declared no less distinctly, that the sentences of wrath

and condemnation would, in all cases, be the fruit of wilful folly and perverseness: of that folly which prefers the darkness to the light, and of that perverseness which persists in evil courses, when the ways of truth and the rules of righteousness are openly displayed.

It is impossible for language to be more clear or more certain, than that of the Divine Redeemer upon these important points. I can safely trust your memories for the truth of this remark.

We may observe next, that it was a Covenant which Christ came to ratify and to establish. It was the great Covenant of Redemption: the word of peace and reconciliation between God and man. The Redeemer, therefore, offers pardon and acceptance under covenanted seals, with the privilege of access to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Ghost. He removes those obstacles which no man could surmount in his own strength. He furnishes all needful succours. He points to the source of these supplies in that union with the sons of men, and that participation of their common nature, to which he vouchsafed to stoop. In him was life; in him, as in its fountain; and from him is it communicated and derived. This is that spiritual union which our Lord expressed in terms so frequent, and however high the subject, in language so distinct. Accordingly we find the Confession of Christ, the everlasting Word, coming in the flesh, to be the new Head of mankind, in whom all should be made alive, expressly set forth as the ground of faith, and the denial of it declared to be the entire subversion of the Christian hope.

From this bond of union, we turn naturally to the course and method

which our Lord pursued, in order to train those to glory who were invited to partake the benefits and to share the blessings which he came to dispense.

Our Lord then proclaimed the terms upon which the privileges of this Covenant were bestowed. He did this in two comprehensive words: "Repent, and believe the Gospel." To do works meet for repentance, was implied in that first stipulation; and the debt of service was involved at all times in the pledge of faith.

On these grounds the Covenant of Salvation stands established.

When our Lord from thenceforth began to call men to his presence, we find that the ready and the well-disposed, those who sought God by the light they had; those who strove to honour him by working righteousness among men, were distinguished by a special word of commendation.

The Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile; the Shepherd, and the Eastern witness; the pious servants of the temple, who received Christ gladly, and confessed him openly; they who freely left all to follow and attend upon him; these found the earliest welcome, and the first reception to his household. With the same seal of approbation was the word of blessing given to many, who either chose that good part readily, and embraced it with a single mind, or who reasoned rightly, and witnessed a considerate and prudent judgment, or testified a sound faith, when they came to Jesus for some present succour, or when they received some sentence of encouragement at his lips. Of this number we know, that many had not Abraham for their Father, except as they displayed the faith of Abraham, and were admitted upon

that account to his inheritance. The word of teaching in our Lord's mouth, and the declarations of his first general discourse, open in a manner exactly suited to the early approbation, which was thus shewn of the heedful and the well-disposed. Thus in the list of those whom our Lord pronounced "blessed," and apt for every benediction; the meek of heart, who are disposed to hear; the pure in mind, who are disposed to practise what they hear; the tractable, and they who cherish peaceful dispositions, with those who hunger after righteousness; these are denominated "blessed," for they shall be so.

How frequently are all these particulars, together with the inferences which are to be collected from them, entirely overlooked in the views which are taken of the call to conversion among men! How often do we find in these views, nothing presented to our notice but the several extremes of moral character, contrasted in exaggerated colours!

But the same Lord and merciful Redeemer called those also to his presence, and his favour, with many a word of kindness and encouragement, who were heavy laden both with griefs and trespasses, for they cleave together. He called the wanderer, the prodigal, the debtor to the laws of God or man. He opened the safe fold to the straggler; for those in Israel who before Christ's coming, had been as sheep without a shepherd; and for those who were to be gathered from far distant places, having long been lost in ignorance and error. He vouchsafed to wait for such as made but little progress. He stooped to bind that which was bruised; to fan the weak and almost suffocated spark, to lift those from the ground who were

wounded and half dead, and quite unable to proceed upon their way; for such indeed was the case, though in different degrees with all men. He applied the needful remedies where no healing hand was found, and where none could give effectual help. He sustained the rescued traveller in his course. He consigned him to safe custody, even until he shall return again, with punctual clemency, to claim his own. But the word which was given for the guidance and instruction of such men was still the same. It was the counsel proper for the reasonable soul, and calculated to its best improvement in a term of trial. To those who found pardon at his hand after days of trespass, the word was, "sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." The privileges of repentance had no further latitude, and no larger sentence of indulgence.

The privilege of Faith also, was declared in many a glowing testimony. It was shewn plainly, that the faith of the reasonable soul is founded upon moral motives and inducements in all its stages of assent and operation.

That this faith might have its proper grounds of rational conviction, Christ wrought his works of miracle. He wrought them for those who would consider, and examine, and believe. "If I do not the works of Him that sent me, believe me not; but if I do, believe me for the works sake." This was plain reasoning, built upon proofs as plain. There was no refuge but in desperate and malicious pleas: and our Lord's reply to them, completed, in a word, the substance of that whole argument, which has stood the test of every cavil, and will stand for ever.

But our Lord made his appeal also to the page of Prophecy. He called men to notice its accomplishment in him, "to whom give all the Prophets witness." This day is this "prophecy fulfilled in your ears," were among the first words of his public teaching; and in a concluding conference with his Disciples, he made the same distinct appeal, with a full and connected exposition of the word of prophecy from first to last.

The Faith which is thus built upon sure foundations, and which has the privilege of accepting what is freely given, has its term of service and its day of trial. Its first engagement, is the first act of that service; and the first purpose and intentions of the faithful heart, become the first proofs and earnestness of its dutiful temper.

The lessons of our Lord's lips, and the pattern of his life; the known rule of his heavenly Father's will, declared in his commandments; his discourses, urged by precept, and illustrated by strong and clear examples; his zeal to vindicate at all times the sacred obligations of truth, mercy, justice, charity, and holiness of heart; his care to rescue them from false interpretations; these things shew sufficiently what the rule of life is, to which the Christian candidate stands bound in the day of his probation.

The succours of Divine Grace keep the same course, and the influences of the Holy Spirit which were first bestowed in all this saving dispensation, and which stand pledged to it forever, were given with a promise of increase to those who cherish them; to those who strive to profit with the gift; whilst the thriftless and improvident will lose all benefit of what they have received. Our Lord declares this

in terms which utterly exclude all doubt; and the same decisive and distinct discriminations are declared to be the rule of future retribution in the great day of account.

I will add but one word more upon this branch of discourse. If, then, God by his Prophet of old time expostulated with his people Israel, demanding what more could be done to his vineyard that he had not done for its culture and improvement; so did our Lord declare, in terms as plain, what his course should be: to dig about the plant; to trench the ground; to prune; to dress; to wait the time of fruit; to use forbearance, with every means of culture and attendance, before the tree should be cut down, and rooted up. So did he also vent expressions in his day of ministry on earth, which were couched in terms of no less passionate concern and keen expostulation; reminding those who enjoyed advantages above all others, that their perverseness and their guilt exceeded, for that reason, former instances of folly.

So uniform are the ways of God! and, observe well, thus consistent are they evermore with his known and declared perfections, and with the moral properties and essential character of man.

The exercise of prayer, which is the breathing of the faithful spirit, and the means for every happy increase in the ways of grace, commended as it is to the lips of his disciples, in that compendious form with which the congregation and the closet have been hallowed in all times succeeding; the pattern for the joint assembly of the Christian flock; the rules of discipline for the corrigible, and for those that would not hear, were all sanctioned by

our Lord's example and prescription, in those first lines of the Christian Church which he traced.

You would justly tax this brief statement with deficiency, if I did not pause here for a moment, in order to survey the last acts of our Redeemer's ministry, after his atoning death, and upon his return in triumph from the grave. We shall then find his care exerted with peculiar words of promise and appointment, to fix the regular provisions, and prescribe the stated methods for the future settlement and perpetual welfare of his Church. There are some particulars for observation arising here, which if well regarded would effectually tend to banish all exorbitancies, and to prevent irregular pretensions, both in points of faith and practice.

Evident it is, then, from the sacred narrative, that the dispensation of Divine Grace with its appointed ministries, its joint exercises and perpetual rules of duty, were made to respect men in their social and collective character: it displays a manifest analogy to the civil ties by which they are held together: so that the bond of spiritual fellowship and duty is compatible with every known relation, social, civil, and domestic, under which men subsist. The remaining point, and that to which I shall once more lead your notice, discovers to us how plainly the Christian course, adapted as it is to the whole improvement of the reasonable soul, was planned for successive measures of increase, to be promoted by the pains of culture, without which no good attainment can be followed with success.

Our Lord, then, appoints his Ministers to gather men and nations into the safe enclosures of his Church; to receive them to the state of grace by one solemn sacramen-

tal rite, and to sustain them in it by another.

Our blessed Lord had before received the child into his presence with express and solemn benedictions; declaring by no doubtful token and assurance, that they should have their privilege in his gracious Covenant, as they enjoyed their interest in that former fold and fellowship, and under that dispensation, whose chief glory it had been to witness for him by its figurative rites, as well as to preserve that rule of righteousness which he confirmed. For the same ends of receiving an adopted family into his peculiar household, and investing them with the privileges of his gracious Covenant, as well as for their progress and proficiency in that path of trial, our Lord engaged to furnish his perpetual oversight and blessing, his ruling and sustaining power and presence, and the furtherance of his Holy Spirit, whose visible descent became the first pledge of his accomplished promises, and was followed by the triumphs of the Gospel in all lands.

The common symbol of our faith was furnished in the first words of dedication to his service, which presents the model of that form of sound words which we must forever hold fast and confess.

[To be concluded.]

For the Repository.

THE TIMES.

At no former period do we recollect to have heard such loud and universal complaints about, what is quaintly termed, "the hardness of the times." The cries of distress assail our ears from every quarter; the decline of commerce, the stagnation of trade, and the scarcity of money, are every where the sources of lamentation. The politician and

been the statesman have endeavoured to account for this state of things, they have traced the causes to imprudence in our merchants in making too large importations; to the multiplication of banks, and to the restoration of peace in Europe. Now some of these, or perhaps all of them, may have contributed to the present state of things; but these, it is not our particular province to investigate. We believe, however, that there were other causes of more powerful operation than any of these, that have brought upon us our present state of national distress—we mean, *our National Sins!* These have been great and manifold; and these, the Bible will assure us, are the true sources of all our afflictions. This nation has heretofore prospered beyond all others; it rose with an unexampled rapidity to an elevated station among the nations of the earth. The blessings of Heaven have been showered upon it in countless profusion; our soil and our waters have yielded abundantly; our commerce has extended to every clime; pestilence has for some years past rarely made its appearance; and the desolating scourge of war, has, comparatively, since the revolutionary struggle, been scarcely felt by us. And what return have we made for all these blessings? Young as our country is, compared with those of the old world, do we not already vie with them in the perpetration of every species of iniquity? Have not luxury and extravagance of every description been carried to a most fearful excess? Have we not manifested a most shameful degree of ingratitude, for the blessings we enjoy? Have we not been most culpably remiss in the discharge of our moral and religious duties? How seldom have we been called upon by the civil authorities to humble our-

selves before the Great Ruler of the Universe, to acknowledge our transgressions, and beg of him pardon and forgiveness, or to return to him the homage of our gratitude for "his innumerable mercies and loving kindnesses." Do not our public journals daily teem with records of the perpetration of the most horrible crimes? Do not murders, robberies, and every species of theft, abound in our land? Does not man still lift against his fellow man the fell weapon of destruction, and in the cool deliberate malice of his heart, violate the commandments of his God, the laws of his country, and all the dear and endearing ties of social life? Is not our land still disgraced by horrible acts of piracy? and do not our murders crimson both the sea and the earth? Such alas! is but too true a picture of our state. And can we, steeped as we are to the very lips in sin and iniquity, hope for the blessings of Heaven upon our nation? We read in the records of eternal truth that "righteousness exalteth a nation," and that "blessed is the people who hath the Lord for their God." Here then is the way pointed out for us to relieve ourselves from our distresses. In vain may we depend upon the exertions of human wisdom to remove the embarrassments which surround us, if we continue by our transgressions to provoke the wrath of Heaven. In spite of all human wisdom and precaution, our calamities will thicken upon us, our distresses will increase, and the judgments of God will at length overtake us.

Great, many, and signal as have been the blessings heaped upon us, yet have we not been without our warnings: The chastisements of Heaven have sometimes in mercy

inflicted upon us; war and pestilence, fires and storms, have all been known amongst us—these awful warnings were doubtless sent *in mercy*, and these we have long disregarded—ought we not to tremble then, least ere long they should be sent *in judgment*. The difficulties, the distresses, the embarrassments which we now feel, are but light in comparison with those which we may anticipate, should we not by repentance seek to avert the just judgments of Heaven.

Let us then, ere it be too late, “turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon us, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon us.” “Let us cease to do evil, let us learn to do good.” Let each one examine himself, to see how much he has contributed to the huge mass of general iniquity. Let each one inquire, “how many things have I done, which I ought not to have done, and how many things have I left undone, which I ought to have done?” Let him ask himself, have I not loved the world, and the things of the world, more than Him who made the world? Have I not hated righteousness and loved iniquity? Has not Mammon been my God? Have I not squandered that wealth which the Almighty entrusted to my care, in pampering my body, in debasing my nature, in gratifying my vanity, my pride, and my unholy desires? Have I not, instead of using it to the glory of God, and the salvation of man, made it the means of corrupting others, of leading them into the paths of sin and death? Have I contributed as much of it, as was in my power, to the promotion of Religion? Have I aided the efforts of those who are engaged in disseminating the light of Revelation into all the dark corners of the earth?

Am I contented with that state of life in which it has pleased Providence to place me? Or do I not murmur at his dispensations, and call in question his mercy and his goodness?

And let it be remembered, that amongst our national sins, the murmurings and repinings of the present day are not the least. Amidst all our distresses, be they real or be they imaginary, we have much, very much, for which to be thankful. The long suffering mercy of God still abideth with us. He gives us “richly all things to enjoy,”

“The fields provide us food, and shew
“The goodness of the Lord.”

Peace still sheds her benign influence over our land, and the blessed light of the Gospel is still shining upon us. Are not these blessings for which we ought to be thankful? Are they not indeed the choicest blessings of Heaven? Why then should not the voice of praise and thanksgiving be heard throughout our land instead of the voice of complaint, and the murmurs of blasphemy? It is because “the heart of man is desperately wicked.” The distresses if such we must call them, which we now suffer, we doubt not are intended for our benefit, and will most assuredly conduce to that end, if we make a proper use of them. Do they not strongly admonish us that luxury has spread too widely its baneful influence amongst us? Do they not call upon us to “look to our ways?” Do they not tell us to live “more soberly, righteously and godly, in this present evil world?”

If such then be the instruction and the benefit, which the present state of things is calculated to afford us, let us not delay to profit by it, and then shall we learn and then shall we know “that righteousness

exalteth a nation," and that "blessed is the people who have the Lord for their God."

Christ the only Saviour of Sinners.

"WITHOUT shedding of blood, there is no remission." We have all a great work upon our hands, the salvation of our immortal souls. We have to make our peace with God, to procure the forgiveness of our numerous sins. But there is no forgiveness of sins except through the sacrifice of Christ. It is the blood of Jesus only which cleanseth from sin, and which alone can purify our guilty souls. Let us beware then how we presume to seek forgiveness in any other way. Men make to themselves many Saviours which they put in the place of Christ. Ask them on what grounds they hope to be forgiven? They will tell you, because they repent of their sins; because they are sorry for them; because they have left off some bad habits; because they have done some good actions; because they are regular in discharging religious duties. But these things are not Saviours—they indeed accompany salvation, but they cannot take away sin. They cannot reconcile us to God. It is only by the blood of Jesus that we are brought nigh. Without an interest in his blood, there is no remission. Here then let our peace be sought where only it can be found. Let us seek it in the blood of Jesus. Let us have our hearts and consciences sprinkled with this blood. Perhaps we tremble at the thought of our sins. The sight of them fills us with alarm. We are ready to conclude that they can never be blotted out. But let us not despair; there is power in the blood of Jesus to cleanse from all sin. Let us wash in this fountain, and though our "sins be as scarlet, they shall

be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

But let us also ever remember, that whilst, through the precious bloodshedding of Christ, there is full forgiveness provided for all sin, yet it is sin confessed, lamented and forsaken, to which alone, this forgiveness will be granted. Christ has not died to save us *in* our sins, but *from* them. None but the truly penitent have an interest in his atoning sacrifice; for none but the truly penitent will in fact apply to him for pardon—sinners who continue impenitent, do not believe in Jesus. Let us then take heed lest we deceive ourselves. Let us not suppose, while we wilfully retain the practice of sin, in our lives, or the love of it in our hearts, that we can have any scriptural hope in Christ. Let us shew, that we indeed belong to him, and have washed our garments in the blood of the Lamb, by "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." *Cooper.*

Cooper on Conviction of Sin, and Real Conversion.

Our Saviour said of the Spirit that when he should come he would "convince the world of sin;" which means, that by his secret work on the heart, he would cause men to see and feel their sins in a way in which they had not seen and felt them before; and this effect he produces by the word of God, which is therefore called "the sword of the Spirit," that effectual instrument which is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." By this spiritual

weapon a man's false peace is destroyed. Hitherto perhaps he has had a good opinion of his own heart. He has thought favourably of his merits and pretensions. *Though he has confessed himself to be a sinner, yet he has never felt that he is one.* He is offended at being told, that he is an enemy to God, and full of all evil. But through mercy he is brought under the faithful preaching of the word. A divine influence attends the appointed instrument. It comes home with power to his heart. It begins with shaking his self-confidence; by degrees it opens to him his own sinful nature; it brings to his remembrance many sins, which he had long forgotten; shows him how very far he is from being the righteous character which he has supposed himself to be; teaches him to measure, not only his actions, but even his words and thoughts, by the pure standard of God's law; sets before him the dreadful punishment threatened against sin, till at length "convinced of all, judged of all," alarmed at his guilt and danger, he anxiously looks around for help, and cries "what shall I do to be saved?" And have we not at times felt something of the same effect? When we have heard the word, have not our consciences been disturbed? Have we not been forced, as it were, to apply what has been said to ourselves, and have felt some serious alarms of our danger? *Such convictions, such alarms, have been the working of God's Spirit on our souls.* God grant that his word may so effectually fasten on our hearts, as to work in us genuine repentance and real faith!

The same instrument which gives the wound, gives also the cure. The word of God, which convinces the soul of sin, reveals also a way,

in which that sin may be forgiven. It proclaims a gracious saviour, whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." It sets before the convinced and trembling sinner, a remedy exactly suited to his wants. It makes known to him the power, goodness, and sufficiency of Christ, the glory of his person as God and man, the purpose of his coming into the world to save sinners; the fulness of that atonement which he has made for sin on the cross; that perfect righteousness which he has wrought out for every believing soul; his merciful calls to the weary and heavy laden; and his readiness to receive and pardon, and cleanse every penitent sinner who comes to him. Those great and seasonable truths are revealed in the word. *while the Spirit effectually applies them to the Heart.* The sinner, burdened with a sense of guilt, receives with joy the tidings of a Saviour; listens with eagerness to the account of his power, grace and goodness; longs to be found among the number of those whom he came to save; calls earnestly upon him for mercy, is *gradually* taught to lay hold of his precious promises: *in proportion as he simply trusts to him for grace and righteousness finds his hopes revived;* and thus at length obtains solid comfort, and is filled with peace and joy in believing. May the Lord grant us to abound more and more *in these proofs of the efficacy of his word.* May he greatly increase among us, those glorious instances of his grace and love, and send forth his Spirit to carry the word, with life and power, to every heart.

One reason why men receive so little profit from the word is, that they *expect* so little. They do not consider it to be, as it is in truth, "the word of God." They regard it merely as intended to convey instruction to the understanding, not

as the appointed instrument for converting the heart. Hence they *do not pray* to feel its saving influence on their souls. They do not pray for the Spirit to accompany the word, and to mix it with faith in their hearts. If we did but pray more constantly and earnestly for God's blessing on what we hear, and read, we should find a blessed work within; we should surely find it to be his word, *by its powerful efficacy on our souls.*

Dr. Johnson—On the happiness which attends a well grounded belief, and steady practice of religion.

THE serenity and satisfaction at which we arrive by a firm and settled persuasion of the fundamental articles of our religion, is very justly represented by the expression of finding rest for the soul. A mind restless and undetermined, continually fluctuating amidst various opinions, always in pursuit of some better scheme of duties, and more eligible system of faith, eager to embrace every new doctrine, and adopt the notions of every pretender to extraordinary light, can never be sufficiently calm and unruffled to attend to those duties which procure that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Suspense and uncertainty distract the soul, disturb its motions, and retard its operations. While we doubt in what manner to worship God, there is great danger lest we should neglect to worship him at all. A man conscious of having long neglected to worship God, can scarcely place any confidence in his mercy, or hope, in the most pressing exigencies, for his protection. And how miserable is that man, who on the bed of sickness, or in the hour of death, is without trust in

the goodness of his Creator. This state, dreadful as it is, may be justly apprehended by those who spend their lives in roving from one new way to another; and are so far from asking for the old paths, where is the good way? that when they are shown it they say, we will not walk therein.

There is a much closer connexion between faith and practice, than is generally imagined. A man disquieted with scruples concerning any important article of religion, will for the most part find himself indifferent and cold, even to those duties which he practised before with the most active diligence and ardent satisfaction. Let him then ask for the old paths, which is the good way? and he shall find rest for his soul. His mind, once set at ease from perplexity and perpetual agitation, will return with more vigour to the exercises of piety. An uniform perseverance in these holy practices, will produce a steady confidence in the Divine favour, and that confidence will complete his happiness.

Extracts.

The heart when it is biassed to any darling notion will always get the better of the head, how good soever it be. Therefore the first rule should be (even in the search of saving knowledge.) *Keep your heart with all diligence.*

The scripture every where asserts, that God *alone* is to be worshipped; the same scriptures declare that our blessed Saviour is to be worshipped. And again, to the Saviour is ascribed *Glory and Praise and Dominion forever and ever.* All the subtleties by which the Antitrinitarians would evade the force of

these texts, only prove, that a man of *plain* understanding, but an honest heart, is less liable to err, than a philosopher of much deeper penetration who has an attachment to some favourite scheme. The latter is fond of *refinements*; and will invent a thousand devices to confute, (what will ever be too hard for him) *common sense*.

The man who is obstinate in the disbelief of his Saviour's Godhead, must be, one would think, strongly tempted to reject the scriptures as a book big with *blasphemy*, since every idea *distinctive* of God from his creatures, is there ascribed to him, unless *paternity*, a mere relation of order, be the *distinctive* idea of God, which is so far from implying any *inferiority*, that it proves the very *reverse*.

Of Afflictions.

How often have afflictions proved the successful messenger of Providence when every other failed! It has gone out into the highways and hedges, and "compelled them to come in" when no entreaty, or remonstrance, could overcome the obduracy of sinners. It cannot be doubted that a part of the felicity of glorified spirits in eternity will consist in tracing the mysterious goodness of God in conducting them through a variety of painful dispensations in the present soul; and it is by no means improbable, that the very events of life, which once occasioned the greatest perplexity, and filled the mind with the most overwhelming anxieties, will hereafter prove the noblest sources of gratitude, and the strongest incentives to praise. A personal, or a relative affliction, which agonizes the soul by the suddenness of its occurrence, or by its dreadful nature, which embitters

life, distracts the mind, confuses every scheme, and confounds every hope, has often proved the real, though perhaps unknown, or unacknowledged means, of turning the feet of the transgressor into the way of peace. It has led the wayward mind to reflection, and the wandering heart to its rest. It has proved the first effectual means of exciting attention to religion; it has subdued and softened the mind, and subjected it to divine teachings; and the once untractable rebel has become tamed into submission, penitence and obedience. In this manner, affliction is often effectually connected with salvation, and the apostolic statement pleasingly realized—"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
Coxe.

Against the formation of a new acquaintance the slightest suspicion ought to be decisive. The frailty of a good name ought to be as proverbial as its value, and virgin fame is far too precious to be ventured upon uncertainty, and far too frail to escape uninjured, even from the appearance of hazard.

We should ever remember, that the gifts of nature and of grace are only trusts, and we should be fearful to abuse them. A wise steward instead of valuing himself upon the extent of his charge, should study how to render the best account of it.

The pang with which I feel and own myself a lost sinner, is sweetened by a remembrance of that mercy, which came to seek and to save me because I was lost.